

A Call for Science that Matters

Ever see a study that makes you scratch your beard? Ever hear about a research result that makes you go “I wish everybody knew about this!”? Ever want to run into a congressman’s office and hit them over the head with a journal article? In this era of technological complexity and postmodern fiction, sometimes brain scans can reveal more about the human condition than a new novel. And yet, while the novels get detailed reviews in the *New York Times*, the best a research study is likely to get is an inaccurate description and some ambiguous quotes from the study’s authors.

Well, here’s your chance to change that. In the comments, post your favorite study — the one that makes you sit up and say “wow, this result ought to change everything”. If you don’t mind, we’ll take the best to help fill up a new website we’re starting, collecting and sharing these new research results. (If you want to help us with the project, [be sure to let us know!](#))

I’ll go first:

In 1994, the RAND Corporation, a major US military think tank, conducted a massive study (with funding from the Office of National drug Control Policy, the US Army, and the Ford Foundation) to measure the effectiveness of various forms of preventing the use of illegal drugs, particularly cocaine.

They analyzed a variety of popular methods and calculated how much it would cost to use each method to reduce cocaine consumption in the US by 1%. Source-country control — military programs to destroy drug production in countries like Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia — are not just devastating to poor third-world citizens; they’re also the least effective, costing \$783 million for a 1% reduction. Interdiction — seizing the drugs at the border — is a much better deal, costing only \$366 million. Domestic law enforcement — arresting drug dealers and such — is even better, at \$246 million. But all of those are blown completely out of the water by the final option: funding treatment programs for drug addicts would reduce drug use by 1% at a cost of only \$34 million.

In other words, for every dollar spent on trying to stop drugs through source-country control, we could get the equivalent of twenty dollars benefit by spending the same money on treatment. This isn’t a bunch of hippy liberals saying this. This is a government think tank, sponsored by the US Army.

OK, your turn.

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